



The North Augusta Living History Park is an eight-acre oasis open year-round as a delightful, passive park and serving on several weekends as the site of acclaimed historical interpretive events.

By Stephen Delaney Hale

Just a few paces from the center of downtown North Augusta, SC, visitors walk down a gradual flower-scented walkway and step back into time.

Fifteen years ago, this multiple-award-winning treasure was an abandoned waterworks and overgrown, swampy, dumping ground. Remarkably, a group of residents saw what it could be, formed the Olde Towne Preservation Association of North Augusta and led by their president, Lynn Thompson, set to work transforming the foul into the sublime.

First, the association landscaped this once-blighted area, cleaning up and defining the lovely spring that comes to the surface in the middle of the park. The brook, which actually babbles a bit, runs a few hundred yards until it pools for the many fish and small animals that have come to live there. A footbridge spans the spring and leads to the park's public house, a replica of the kind of tavern where Colonial Americans ate, satisfied their thirst, debated politics and made local decisions together.

Over the years, association members have added a blacksmith's forge, slave quarters, meeting house, backwoods cabin and educational cabin using authentic construction methods and materials. Members have also restored a number of the area's original structures such as the waterworks that supplied the Spring House Tavern and the smokehouse, cook pit and the encampment grounds that once served soldiers, merchant settlers and Native Americans.

Now, North Augusta residents step down into this civic sanctuary to briefly shut out the world — to read a book, to watch the songbirds, to walk with their sweetheart or just to take time to think.



However, this urban retreat has a second identity. On a few weekends a year, the park becomes the venue for dedicated Colonial-era interpreters. From a handful at first and then dozens, now over 200 people populate the park, dressed as 18th-century Colonists, living the lives of those who covered the same ground 250 years before.

During the park's two annual interpretive history events, visitors can sample bread baked in Colonial era-style ovens, watch as butter is churned or get a pint of cider and a hot meal at the tavern. They may learn to tell what time it is at the granite sundial, buy a slab of venison at the smokehouse, watch the blacksmith make nails and, in one stop, go to school, give a political opinion or pray to their God at the Willow Springs Meeting House.

Among the organized events the association sponsors are:

- "The Olde Towne Artisans Fair" — on the third weekend in April, spring flowers compete with fine arts and the

wares of traditional artisans.

- "Under the Crown" — on the first weekend in June, get a glimpse of the desperate year of 1780 when Patriots were on the run from the soldiers of the crown. In 2006, hundreds of interpreters from South Carolina and Georgia came together to re-enact the 225th anniversary of the siege of Ft. Cornwallis in Augusta (in 1781), a pivotal moment in the American Revolution.
- "Colonial Times: A Day to Remember" — the third weekend in October marks the park's major annual event, a two-day study of Colonial ways.
- "Christmas for the Birds" — the first weekend in December is one of sharing and teaching the art of giving to nature. "A Day to Remember" annually draws thousands of visitors who get to interact with 200-plus historical interpreters, all going about their daily 18th-century business.

"We work all year 'round for this weekend," says Thompson.



"People are devoted to this, and they come here from all across the Southeast and the nation." During "A Day to Remember," Thompson becomes a 1750s woman with a linen dress, scarf and a pair of worn shoes she's quite particular about.

The group's latest addition is a sensory garden, a winding pathway through the park with rails and Braille for the blind, flowers placed for their fragrances, a "melody stream" with several water features placed for their sound and reflections and a bridge and other features that produce a "wind orchestra" in the breeze.

Most of the park's expense is provided by the labor of the hard-working and dedicated members of the association. They like to think they got that spirit of community from the brave souls who toiled on this same land above the wide Savannah River all those years ago.

